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Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 84, Folder 12, Kaufman, Curtis, 1990.

Curt Kaufman

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January 3, 1990

Rabbi Tannenbaum
45 E. 89 St.
New York, NY 10028

Dear Rabbi Tannenbaum:

Curtis, my husband and son of Reuben Kaufman of Chicago, are writing you to request your assistance as Scholarly Consultant on the application we're making for a grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH).

The project for which I'm requesting funding is the writing and development into a motion picture of a screenplay titled MARIA. It will deal with an important and largely unexplored aspect of the beginnings of the Holocaust.

MARIA is a love story set in the last six months before America enters World War II. It tells of a young Jewish mother who with her family escapes from Vienna in 1941. They settle in upstate New York. There she is obsessed with saving the rest of her family still trapped in Europe. But she finds herself enmeshed in a love affair and is trapped in the perennial struggle between passion and duty.

This is an important Humanities Project, for the screenplay deals with the period when the Jews could have still escaped Germany. It deals with the barrier that American immigration laws and the indifference of many Americans, including Jews, erected against that escape. This aspect of the Holocaust has yet to be dealt with dramatically in a meaningful way -- and we feel that film is the most effective way to reach the minds and hearts of a broad audience.

Your support would give much credence to our application.

Much of the material in Maria is based on personal experience, for I and my family were among the lucky ones. We escaped from Vienna in 1940 and ended up in Upstate New York. Although I was very young, I remember my mother's desperate -- and mostly futile -- attempts to save the rest of our family.

The NEH application deadline is March 15th, 1989.

(more)

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From you we would hope to receive the following:

a letter stating that:

You understand and support the MARIA project.

You are committed to it for the time covered.

You agree to be a Historian Consultant in the field of German-Austrian Jewish Immigration and American Jewish History from 1938-1941.

The degree of your collaboration.

b) A one page summary of your curriculum vita.

I've enclosed a copy of the MARIA Treatment and Bibliography. In addition I've included a copy of Professor David Reimes' letter of recommendation, part of a letter my father wrote during his first days in America, reviews on our books, and our resumes.

Much of the research is already finished. So all I would need from you is your letter of commitment and your resume. Any further help, for which we would be most grateful, would be at your discretion.

My co-author and husband, Curt Kaufman, is also a still photographer for motion pictures and has worked on 40 theatrical and TV films.

In addition, together we have written several children's books published by Atheneum. I've included a review of our book HOTEL BOY which appeared in the Sunday New York Times Book Review.

I am a NYC public school teacher and have just completed a special study sabbatical on Film and the Humanities.

I'll be most happy to supply any additional information you need so please feel free to call at your convenience.

Frankly, I feel your consultation on this project would go a long way toward making our vision a reality.

Best regards.

Sincerely yours,

Gita Kaufman
Gita Kaufman

GK/cm

Encl:

P.S. Just read your splendid quotes in J. Danesoni's "The Holocaust in America's Film." We need someone of your calibre. We promise we won't take much of your time. Best regards from Curt.